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On Befuddlement

IN EXPRESSING his belief that the Russian people are "pretty badly befuddled" by the Kremlin campaign to downgrade the late Premier Joseph Stalin, Allen W. Dulles, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, probably is correct. The rest of his views on the same subject are neither convincing nor impressive.

Mr. Dulles has the advantage of the information gathered by the Central Intelligence Agency to shape his thinking. But he does not appear to have taken into consideration one characteristic of most people, including, of course, the Russians.

Asserting that the new Communist leadership is trying to destroy a well-entrenched legend, Mr. Dulles added, "I don't believe you can do that to a people." And, describing the anti-Stalin campaign as an attempt to persuade the peoples of the Soviet bloc that the new leaders are doing away with tyranny, he said, "I don't believe they are."

Presumably Mr. Dulles meant to express his disbelief that the Kremlin is persuading the people, rather than to voice his doubts that the Red leadership is doing away with tyranny, for the latter opinion is one held pretty widely on this side of the Iron Curtain without Mr. Dulles' assurance.

That some of the Soviet people are or have been befuddled is no secret, either, as was demonstrated by the rioting in Stalin's native Georgia in resentment of the downgrading campaign. But that the confusion which exists in Georgia and probably in many other sections as well can be succeeded only by skepticism on the part of the ones who don't know what to think is veering off too abruptly in the direction of wishful thinking.

The factor Mr. Dulles apparently has neglected to consider in arriving at his opinion is that hope is one of the basic characteristics of human nature. The majority of the Soviet peoples get virtually all their information from their bosses. Influenced partly by the easing of some restrictions already, the subjects of the Soviet are pretty likely to believe that their leaders really do mean to do away with tyranny. They will believe it because they want to believe it.